



1) Opening prayer

Lord,
increase our eagerness to do your will
and help us to know the saving power of your love.
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel reading - Luke 21,12-19

Jesus said to his disciples: 'You will be seized and persecuted; you will be handed over to the synagogues and to imprisonment, and brought before kings and governors for the sake of my name -and that will be your opportunity to bear witness.

Make up your minds not to prepare your defence, because I myself shall give you an eloquence and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relations and friends; and some of you will be put to death. You will be hated universally on account of my name, but not a hair of your head will be lost.

Your perseverance will win you your lives.

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel, which is the continuation of the discourse begun yesterday, Jesus lists the different signs to help the communities to place themselves in the events and not to lose faith in God, nor the courage to resist against the attacks of the Roman Empire. We will repeat the first five signs mentioned in yesterday's Gospel:

1st sign: the false Messiahs (Lk 21, 8);

2nd sign: war and revolutions (Lk 21, 9);

3rd sign: nations which fight against other nations, a kingdom against another kingdom (Lk 21, 10);

4th sign: earth quakes in different places (Lk 21, 11);

5th sign: hunger, plagues and signs in the sky (Lk 21, 11);

The Gospel of yesterday ends here. Now, in today's Gospel another sign is added:

6th sign: the persecution of Christians (Lk 21, 12-19).

- Luke 21,12. The sixth sign is the persecution. Various times, in the few years which he

lived among us, Jesus had warned the disciples that they would be persecuted. Here, in the last discourse, he repeats the same warning and makes them know that the persecution has to be taken into consideration in discerning the signs of the times: "You will be seized and persecuted, you will be handed over to the Synagogues and to imprisonment, and brought before kings and governors, for the sake of my name". And of these, apparently very negative warnings, Jesus had said: "Do not be terrified for this is something that must happen first, but the end will not come at once". (Lk 21, 9). And the Gospel of Mark adds that all these signs "have only begun, this is the beginning of the birth pangs!" (Mk 13, 8). Now, the birth pangs though being very painful for the mother are not a sign of death, but rather of life! They are not a reason to fear, but rather to hope! This way of reading the events brings peace to the persecuted communities. Thus, reading or hearing these signs, prophesized by Jesus in the year 33, the readers of Luke of the years 80 could conclude: "All these things already take place according to the plan foreseen and announced by Jesus! Therefore, the history has not escaped from God's hand! God is with us!"

- Luke 21, 13-15: The mission of the Christians during the time of persecution. Persecution is not something fatal, neither can it be a reason for discouragement or for despair, but it should be considered as a possibility offered by God, in a way that the communities may carry out the mission of witnessing to the Good News of God. God says: "That will be your opportunity to bear witness. Make up your minds not to prepare your defence because I myself shall give you eloquence and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to resist or contradict".

By means of this affirmation Jesus encourages the persecuted Christians who lived anguished. He makes them know that, even if persecuted, they had a mission to carry out, that is: to give witness of the Good News of God and thus be a sign of the Kingdom (Ac 1, 8). The courageous witness would lead the people to repeat what the magi in Egypt said before the signs and to have courage like Moses and Aaron: "The finger of God is here" (Ex 8, 15). Conclusion: if the communities should not be worried, if everything is in God's hands, if everything was already foreseen, if everything is nothing more than birth pangs, then there is no reason to worry.

- Luke 21, 16-17: Persecution even within the family. "You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relations and friends, and some of you will be put to death; you will be hated universally on account of my name". Persecution does not only come from outside, from the Empire, but also from inside, on the part of one's own family. In one same family, some accepted the Good News, others did not. The announcement of the Good News caused divisions within families. There were even some persons, who basing themselves on the Law of God, denounced and killed their own relatives who declared themselves followers of Jesus (Dt 13, 7-12).

- Luke 21, 18-19: the source of hope and of resistance. "But not a hair of your head will be lost. Your perseverance will win you your lives!" This final observation of Jesus recalls the other word which Jesus had said: "But not a hair of your head will be lost!" (Lk 21, 18). This comparison was a strong call not to lose faith and to continue righteously in the community. And this also confirms what Jesus had said on another

occasion: Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it, but anyone who will lose his life for my sake will save it" (Lk 9, 24).

4) Personal questions

- How do you usually read the stages of the history of your life or of your country?
- Looking at the history of humanity of the last years, has hope increased or diminished in you?

5) Concluding prayer

Yahweh has made known his saving power,
revealed his saving justice for the nations to see,
mindful of his faithful love
and his constancy to the House of Israel. (Ps 98,2-3)